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***Put doubts on hold and commit to Iraq***

*In recent weeks, there have been a number of calls for investigations of the administration's rationale for invading Iraq and its conduct both before and during the war.*

*U.S. Rep. Nancy Pelosi (D-Calif.), Democratic leader in the House of Representatives, filed a resolution calling for "a thorough investigation of [alleged administration] abuses relating to the Iraq war." Republicans moved to block debate and table her motion. I was the lone Democrat who joined them.*

*Pelosi and others in my party understandably viewed my vote as an exceptional affront. No question, we need to resolve the specific issues Pelosi identified in her motion. But we've done enough of that for now, arguably too much.*

*Reasonable doubts like Pelosi's abound concerning the Iraq war, its justification, its prosecution. Unfortunately, addressing them now would have the inevitable effect of eroding public support. Some seek that erosion for principled reasons. But their timing is awful. The battle for Iraq's future is nearing the tipping point.*

*I co-chair a House Armed Services Committee panel investigating gaps in America's ability to meet the threat of global jihadist terrorism. We have been asked, "Given this threat, what is the most dangerous scenario to U.S. national security interests?" Most would cite use of weapons of mass destruction within the United States. But to me that answer only describes consequences. The real threat to our national security is the loss of political will to patiently deal with this amorphous, adaptive, enduring threat.*

*The current violent jihad within Islam began in the 1950s. A radical, determined minority would impose Taliban-like regimes throughout the Muslim world. The vast majority of Muslims oppose these extremists. But most do so silently. Open dissent invites death.*

*Iraq is now the central battlefield for this conflict within Islam. To be sure, most of the Iraqi insurgents are not violent jihadists. But they are aligned with the jihadist cause. Success for the insurgency in Iraq is success for the violent jihad movement, for Osama bin Laden, for Abu Musab al-Zarqawi. It would be viewed that way throughout the Muslim world. Islam would move toward the global jihadist view, toward the Taliban.*

*No American leader wants that to happen. Not only would it be a human tragedy for the Middle East, but security threats and economic problems for America would increase dramatically. We*

would then further compromise our civil liberties in search of security. And increased security concerns would exhaust resources we might otherwise have put to better use.

So liberals and peace activists should now constructively support this war. Questioning the decision to invade Iraq won't change what's done. No one should now differ with continuing the effort to establish a stable, anti-jihad Iraq. And by now everyone should realize that Iraqis are the key to accomplishing this objective.

Whether Iraqis will secure an anti-jihad Iraq has yet to be determined. They are making slow, steady, mundane progress. We should have a much better feel for Iraq's fate, failure or success, within the next year or so. The likely tipping point is just that close. Enough time will have passed for Iraqi debating, politicking, preaching, electing, training and equipping.

Iraq will certainly fail if America withdraws prematurely. And as we appear to be losing our political will, the insurgency is encouraged and, at best, Iraqis on the sidelines stay put. They well recall Desert Storm. America urged the Shiites to rebel, then abandoned them to slaughter.

There is no question, however, that our presence in Iraq fuels the insurgency. For that reason, we should expect that Iraq's leadership will direct that we modify our operations or withdraw — just as soon as Iraqis have the institutional capacity to internally secure their country. Americans simply haven't the perspective to make that call.

Putting off for now the legitimate issues raised by Pelosi is frustrating at best, particularly for those who have consistently questioned the administration's rationale for and conduct of this war. But delaying further investigation and debate on these issues is the right strategic choice at this stage of the conflict.

A sad truth is, however, that this delay occurred simply because the presidency and congressional leadership rest in the same party. Otherwise Washington's intense polarization would already have produced the very investigations Pelosi now seeks. Just recall the rampant, vocal dissension in Congress over our effort in Kosovo.

A sadder truth is that the alignment of Washington political control in one party has lessened the quantity and quality of congressional oversight. Blame for poor decisions on this and other matters, both past and present, must be shared by a congressional majority excessively deferential to the administration.

When Pelosi's requested investigations eventually occur, most members of Congress expect they will produce additional bad news for the administration, which is another reason for the "rest of the story" to wait awhile, politics be damned.

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